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SUBJECT: TURKEY: AHMET TURK RAISES THE PROFILE OF DTP'S MODERATE WING

REF: A. ANKARA 964 B. 1404

Classified By: Political Counselor Daniel O'Grady, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: Recent statements by pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) leader Ahmet Turk have raised the profile of DTP's more moderate wing. Turk, re-elected as party co-chairman at DTP's July convention, called for peaceful resolution through dialogue of Turkey's intractable Kurdish problem. Turk deplored recent bombings in Izmir and Istanbul, attributed to the PKK-affiliated Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), as "a blow to peace." In an August 25 meeting with PolCouns, Poloff, and Pol FSN, Turk reiterated DTP's demands for Kurdish linguistic, educational, political and cultural rights, adding that despite pressure, DTP is ready to talk to all actors about improving conditions for Turkey's Kurds. After a brief resurgence by DTP hardliners sent the moderate Turk to the sidelines last year, Turk's return to the helm is a positive development. As one of DTP's most experienced political leaders, Turk may yet salvage something from DTP's lackluster performance since entering parliament in 2007. Still, between reining in his hardline co-chair, Emine Ayna, and countering the ruling party's aggressive local elections campaign strategy in the southeast, Turk may have a hard time getting his message of peaceful dialogue heard. End summary and comment.

Turk's Election Signifies "Momentary" DTP Reconciliation

¶2. (C) DTP members restored Turk as party co-chairman (along with hardliner Emine Ayna) at the July convention, after forcing Turk and Aysel Tugluk, both considered moderates, out of the party leadership last November to make room for Ayna and her fellow firebrand Nurettin Demirtas. Support for Turk's more moderate approach plummeted following DTP's dismal showing on its home turf in July 2007 parliamentary elections and the GOT's cross-border operations against the PKK in Northern Iraq. Demirtas's grab for the helm was derailed by his conviction for evading military service using faked medical reports; Ayna filled the void until the party congress vote. At the convention, widely viewed as a brief reconciliation between DTP hawks and doves, both Turk and Ayna focused their speeches on the state's need to establish dialogue with Kurds in order to strengthen Turkey. As Turk said, "We do not have ideological differences within the party but in politics there may be different attitudes."

Turk Reiterates DTP's Core Demands, Condemns Violence

¶13. (C) Meeting with PolCouns August 25, Turk reiterated DTP's demands for constitutional protection for expressing cultural and ethnic identity, Kurdish-language education, and "democratic autonomy" that allows each province or region to assume an increased role in decision-making. Turk stressed that increased dialogue among all actors, supported by state-sponsored social projects for the Southeast, is the only way to solve the decades-old conflict. He emphasized the need to abolish Turkey's ten percent election threshold, which limits DTP representation in parliament. The party circumvented the threshold by running candidates as independents in 2007 general elections, but would have been more successful had it been able to run as a party, Turk said.

¶14. (C) The key to solving the Kurdish problem is the state's attitude toward Kurds, according to Turk; the state must show it intends to resolve the conflict through democratic means. "We openly tell the PKK to disregard arms as a means to obtain rights. But there is a societal reality. Kurds will react to policies based on a denial of their identity and their cultural demands," he said, adding, "As long as the state does not change those policies, it cannot reduce the influence of the PKK on people." Turk reiterated his firm opposition to violence. In an August interview with daily Yeni Safak, Turk had acknowledged armed conflict is not the answer. "No matter how right you may be, it is no longer possible to support armed struggle," he said. "I'm giving a message to both sides: resorting to guns should no longer be a means for looking for one's rights and the state must stop silencing the Kurds with a stick." Turk said he has urged his colleagues to be realistic: "Unless we conduct politics by considering social sensitivities, we will be disappointed."

AKP's Kurdish Policies Lacking

¶15. (C) The ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP's) efforts have been ineffective in resolving the Kurdish problem, Turk claimed. In 2007, AKP won considerable credit among Kurds in the Southeast for resisting demands by Turkish nationalists and the military to strike the PKK inside Iraq and for showing sympathy for Kurdish demands for expanded culture and language rights. Many believed AKP was not part of the status quo and could contribute to a solution but they have been disappointed, Turk said. Kurds interpreted the February cross-border operation and AKP's focus on lifting the headscarf ban at universities instead of tackling broader constitutional reform as indifference toward their interests, Turk explained. PM Erdogan followed-up his campaign speeches recognizing the Kurdish problem by "ignoring" DTP.

¶16. (C) Turk viewed AKP's recent green-lighting of Kurdish language broadcasts on state television as important, but predicted the measure would be ineffective absent AKP "internalizing" the need to recognize Kurds' right to express their culture. The state's previous 30-minute weekly Kurdish language broadcasts were insulting to Kurds, he said, because they favored boring documentaries about ants and mice instead of quality programming about meaningful, topics of interest to Kurds.

Ergenekon Could Create Sympathy for Kurds

¶17. (C) Turk described Ergenekon, the alleged crime organization, as an important development that could help Turks understand how much Kurds have suffered at the hands of hardline police and Jandarma officials. Several of the suspects being investigated were allegedly responsible for orchestrating murders and burning down villages while serving as military commanders in the Southeast, Turk said. By

shedding light on incidents like Susurluk and Semdinli, where military and state officials were caught red-handed but never punished, the investigation may create sympathy for Kurds among Turks, and reduce Kurdish antipathy toward Turks.

Closing DTP Will Harm All Turkey

¶8. (C) Though DTP welcomed the Constitutional Court's July 30 decision to fine but not close AKP, Turk noted the closure case against his party continues. "AKP is not pro-Sharia and we are not pro-separatism," Turk said. If DTP is closed, Kurds will feel unwanted and Turkey would be stuck at the current impasse, he predicted. AKP should fulfill its pledge to amend the Political Parties Law to make party closure more difficult, Turk said, adding, "AKP cannot ignore others after it is saved." Despite the pressure on DTP, Turk emphasized the party is ready to talk to all actors, including political leaders and the military, about the Kurdish issue. He denied any "organic tie" between DTP and the PKK, noting, "People mistakenly think taking DTP as an interlocutor would be seen as a compromise to the PKK but this is not true." Until the Kurdish problem is resolved, Turkey will not undergo the transformation it needs, he said.

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